CLAIMS:

What is claimed is:

1. A method of generating a logically merged web module for a web application, comprising:

determining if the web application includes a reference to at least one shared web module that may be incorporated into a plurality of web applications;

identifying a location of the at least one shared web module; and

logically merging the at least one shared web module with web modules of the web application, if any, to generate a logically merged web application.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

loading the logically merged web application into a web container.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein determining if the web application includes a reference to at least one shared web module includes determining if the web application includes a shared web module designation file.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the web application is an enterprise archive (EAR) and wherein the logically merged web application is a logically merged EAR.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one shared web module includes at least one of a web archive

(WAR) file, an enterprise java bean (EJB) archive file, and a resource archive (RAR) file.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein logically merging the at least one shared web module with web modules of the web application includes:

determining a priority associated with the at least one shared web module; and

resolving any conflicts between shared web modules in the at least one shared web module and conflicts between the at least one shared web module and web modules of the web application, if any.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the steps of determining, identifying, and logically merging are performed during an initialization process of a runtime environment for initializing the web application to be run on a server.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein logically merging the at least one shared web module with the web modules of the web application includes using a service provider interface (SPI) that provides merge logic for merging different module types.

9. The method of claim 2, wherein the container uses one or more application program interfaces (APIs) to identify a path to the at least one shared web module and loads the at least one shared web module when loading the logically merged web application.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein logically merging the at least one shared web module with web modules of the web application includes at least one of relinking references to the at least one shared web module in the web modules of the web application, extrapolating policy information for the at least one shared web module from a policy file associated with the web application, and modifying a class path for the web application to include paths to each of the at least one shared web modules.

11. A computer program product in a computer readable medium for generating a logically merged web module for a web application, comprising:

first instructions for determining if the web application includes a reference to at least one shared web module that may be incorporated into a plurality of web applications;

second instructions for identifying a location of the at least one shared web module; and

third instructions for logically merging the at least one shared web module with web modules of the web application, if any, to generate a logically merged web application.

12. The computer program product of claim 11, further comprising:

fourth instructions for loading the logically merged web application into a web container.

13. The computer program product of claim 11, wherein the first instructions for determining if the web application includes a reference to at least one shared web module include instructions for determining if the web application includes a shared web module designation file.

14. The computer program product of claim 11, wherein the third instructions for logically merging the at least one shared web module with web modules of the web application include:

instructions for determining a priority associated with the at least one shared web module; and

instructions for resolving any conflicts between shared web modules in the at least one shared web module and conflicts between the at least one shared web module and web modules of the web application, if any.

15. The computer program product of claim 11, wherein the first, second and third instructions are executed during an initialization process of a runtime environment for initializing the web application to be run on a server.

16. The computer program product of claim 11, wherein the third instructions for logically merging the at least one shared web module with the web modules of the web application include instructions for using a service provider interface (SPI) that provides merge logic for merging different module resources.

17. The computer program product of claim 12, wherein the container uses one or more application program interfaces (APIs) to identify a path to the at least one shared web module.

18. The computer program product of claim 11, wherein the third instructions for logically merging the at least one shared web module with web modules of the web application include at least one of instructions for relinking references to the at least one shared web module in the web modules of the web application, instructions for extrapolating policy information for the at least one shared web module from a policy file associated with the web application, and instructions for modifying a class path for the web application to include paths to each of the at least one shared web modules.

19. An apparatus for generating a logically merged web module for a web application, comprising:

means for determining if the web application includes a reference to at least one shared web module that may be incorporated into a plurality of web applications;

means for identifying a location of the at least one shared web module; and

means for logically merging the at least one shared web module with web modules of the web application, if any, to generate a logically merged web application.

20. The computer program product of claim 19, further comprising:

means for loading the logically merged web application into a web container.